

October 2003

Dear friends and neighbors,

It's property tax time again. If you are a senior citizen who may be struggling on a fixed income to pay your property taxes, let us ask you a question: Are you taking full advantage of the property tax relief available to seniors?

As homeowners prepare to pay their taxes for the second half of this year (due Oct. 31), we're reminded of the extraordinary burden property tax bills place on many low-income seniors. You've worked hard all your life to afford your own home...and then you are forced to pay higher, unaffordable taxes to the government as assessments skyrocket. It doesn't seem fair, does it?

We remain very concerned for homeowners whose taxes rise faster than their income. For this reason, we sponsored **House Bill 1343**, a measure that would further ease the property tax burden for senior citizens. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts to move this bill forward, the House majority party refused to allow a vote on this important legislation.

In past years, however, the Legislature has adopted tax breaks for seniors. If you qualify and are not taking advantage of this tax relief, read on and we'll tell you how you can do so.

As always, we are interested in hearing from you about this or any other issue regarding state government. You may call or write our offices using the address/phone information listed below.

Thank you for allowing us to serve you!

*Tom Mielke Ed Orcutt*

**State Representatives • 18th District**  
**Tom Mielke • Ed Orcutt**



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**ARE YOU GETTING THE  
PROPERTY TAX RELIEF  
YOU DESERVE?**

**State Representatives**  
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**Ed Orcutt**

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Olympia, WA 98504-0600

**Important Property Tax  
Information for Senior Citizens**

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**18th District  
State Representatives**  
**Tom Mielke**

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State Representatives  
**Tom Mielke**  
**Ed Orcutt**

# Senior Citizen Property Tax Relief

## PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS

### Who qualifies?

The Legislature has expanded the number of seniors who qualify for property tax exemptions.

You may qualify for property tax exemptions if you meet all of the following criteria:

- You are at least 61 years of age or disabled.
- You own and live in a single-family home, mobile home, or condominium.
- You have a combined household income not exceeding \$30,000.

Expenses for some nursing or home-health care and some medications may be deducted when calculating your income. You also can remain eligible for tax breaks if your home is rented while you're in the hospital or nursing home.

### Valuation limit

Qualifying citizens are entitled to property tax exemptions on their principal residence and up to one acre of land. The value of the residence is frozen at its value on Jan. 1 of the year in which you first qualify for the program.

### Exemption schedule

You are eligible for the following exemptions if your combined household income falls within the range indicated:

#### Income

\$24,001 to \$30,000

\$18,001 to \$24,000

\$18,000 or less

#### Exemption

All excess levies (*special school levies are an example of excess levies*).

All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$40,000 or 35 percent of assessed valuation (*\$60,000 maximum*).

All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$50,000 or 60 percent of assessed valuation.

## PROPERTY TAX DEFERRALS

If you are at least 60 years of age or retired because of physical disability — and your disposable income is \$34,000 or less — you may qualify for property tax deferrals. The state allows property tax deferrals on up to 80 percent of the equity in your home. The deferral program applies to your principal residence and up to five acres, if zoning requires a larger parcel size.

Under this program, you pay no property tax until the home is sold. The state pays the deferred taxes, and in exchange, receives a lien against the property equal to the amount of owed taxes plus 8 percent. Total taxes are collected when the property is sold or passed on.



## REMODELING

People who remodel single-family homes can qualify for tax exemptions on the increased value of their property. Owners may claim tax exemptions on new additions of up to a third of the original value of their homes for three full years following remodeling. This exemption is available to all homeowners. **Be sure to contact the assessor's/treasurer's office before you finish your remodel project. Otherwise, you won't get the break.**

### ► How to apply for property tax breaks

For information on both property tax exemptions and deferrals, call your county assessor:

**Clark County Assessor** ..... (360) 397-2391

**Cowlitz County Assessor** ..... (360) 577-3010

For more information about our state's property tax laws, call:

**Washington State Department of Revenue** ... 1-800-647-7706

## MAKING MORE SENIORS ELIGIBLE FOR TAX RELIEF



Reducing the property tax burden to keep housing affordable has been an ongoing effort for us in the Legislature. This past year, Rep. Orcutt introduced and Rep. Mielke co-sponsored House Bill 1343, which contained several provisions for property tax relief, and would have required the state Department of Revenue to readjust the income and property valuation amounts annually to compensate for inflation. HB 1343 also would have allowed people to deduct the costs of health insurance coverage, eyeglasses and hearing aids when calculating their disposable income.

In addition, Rep. Mielke co-sponsored House Bill 1029, which would have increased the combined disposable income threshold used to determine who qualifies for property tax exemptions.

Unfortunately, of the eight senior citizen property tax relief bills introduced this year, including the two we sponsored, none was allowed to come up for a vote in the House Finance Committee. We will continue to work on this issue until you get the tax relief you deserve.

## WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

*We'd like to hear from you regarding property taxes or any other issue that involves state government. Please contact us and share your thoughts.*

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